

# OLD SCHOOL

VS

# THE NEW RULE

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Photos: Rick Arnold

**The shooting industry, like any other, loves buzz words. One word that's at the top of the list these days is *modular*. Folks are all a-twitter over the new bits and pieces that can now be swapped, traded, or upgraded on the latest models of rifles and handguns.**

You might be surprised to find this out, but not only is the modular approach not a new idea, but a firearm company in Granbury Texas was producing high quality modular guns for almost 15 years before the concept was 'hip'.

The Bond Arms double-barrel pistol offers much more flexibility than other small handguns in the marketplace. Using a Defender frame, you can attach or remove the trigger guard, change barrel length, change caliber, or install three different grip shapes. The Defender can be transformed from a pocket-sized powerhouse to a unique over-under .410 pistol with the balance and handling of a mid sized semi-auto.

The tricky thing about modularity, as the do-it-yourself gunsmiths already know, is that not all of the bits and pieces are necessarily going to get along. How about a universal light mount that turn out to be rail sensitive, or expensive caliber conversion kits that are supposed to function flawlessly on hundreds of makes of pistol frames, but it jams endlessly on yours? Been there, done that, cursed vehemently.

Can Bond's double-barrel pistol, inspired by Derringer's 19th century design, really be expected to change shape, size, and caliber successfully? What about handling multiple calibers, including big-bore rounds like .44 Special and .45 Colt? Though the reviews of Bond's products over the years have been positive, they have yet to be inclusive. I decided it was time for a thorough ring-out to test this pistol's potential.

## FRAMES

For this review, I used two Bond Arms Defender frames. One frame is a used trade-in from a local shop. I checked with Bond Arms and found out it was manufactured in 2003. Who knows what

adventures its seen in the last seven years. Though it shows scratches and holster wear, this frame shows no obvious signs of abuse. The other frame was also purchased locally, but it was factory fresh with a manufacture date of 2009.

I was interested to see how a frame from the middle of Bond's production history and its latest model would compare when put to work side-by-side. Some gun manufacturers hit rough patches along the way and choose to cut corners, resulting in fluctuations in quality control. This is not the case with Bond Arms. Both the '03 and '09 frame show the same dedication to quality, fit, and finish. Both frames took a pounding, and both look and act ready for years of reliable use yet to come.

## BARRELS

Folks who think of this pistol as a typical derringer will not expect much in the way of performance. However, the test results produced by the team at *Ballistics By the Inch* tell a different story. Like the Thompson Contender they used as the baseline test gun, the Bond pistol has a hinged action. This means that no

## REAL-WORLD VELOCITIES

Caliber	Ammunition Brand	Velocity (fps)	
		Thompson Contender 3" Barrel	Bond Arms Defender 3" Barrel
.38 Spec	Cor Bon 110 gr DPX	963	1020
	Cor Bon 125 gr JHP	854	900
.357 Mag	Cor Bon 125 gr DPX	1271	1313
	Federal 130 gr Hydra-Shok JHP	1194	1221
.44 Spec	Cor Bon 165 gr JHP	906	956
	Cor Bon 200 gr DPX	859	871
.45 acp	Federal 165 gr FJ Expanding LR	991	1013
	Federal 185 gr Hydra-Shok JHP	870	917

The tight tolerances of the Defender's hinged action, combined with the right ammunition, can generate impressive bullet velocities. (<http://www.ballisticsbytheinch.com/>)



Name a pistol caliber you prefer and Bond Arms is likely have a barrel for it.

energy produced by the fired cartridge is lost through a cylinder gap or used up working the action. All of the pressure stays directly behind the bullet until it leaves the barrel. As you can see in the table, these double-barrel pistols are capable of solid ballistic performance. (For more information, visit BBTI at: [www.ballisticsbytheinch.com](http://www.ballisticsbytheinch.com))

Some ammunition and gun combinations just don't work out. With that in mind, I have to say that Bond Arms' pistols are the least ammo sensitive guns I have ever used. While conducting the shooting tests, I fired eleven different pistol-caliber barrels with fourteen different calibers of ammunition while attached to two different frames. Hundreds of rounds later, these pistols had merrily munched their way through everything I fed them. That's impressive.

Did all the test barrels fit and function with both frames? Yes, in fact the fit was good enough to make me think the barrels had been factory-fitted to the frames rather than provided off-the-shelf. Any catastrophic failures or broken components? Nope. Failures to load or fire? None. Wild or wandering shots? A few, but only when the trigger man fell asleep at his post. Failures to eject? Only two, and one was ammunition related.

## BOND ARMS PRESENTS: THE AMAZING MODULAR DOUBLE-BARREL PISTOL

### A STICKY SITUATION

Considering all the factors involved in this test, two failures to eject are hardly worth mentioning. However, both of these situations have shown up before and Bond Arms felt it would be helpful to review them here.

The first failure to eject involved the pistol's release lever. With a .40 S&W barrel mounted to the 2003 Defender

frame, I fired my first two test rounds, then pressed the release lever to reload. I found the release was stuck in the locked position. It was stuck tightly enough that I had to tap it open with a tool. I switched the barrel over to the 2009 frame, then fired again. The release opened with its usual ease.

Since I could not confirm at that point if I was dealing with an ammunition problem, I fired this barrel again on both frames using different brands of ammunition. The results were the same: the '03 frame release stuck tight, while the '09 release would swing free. When I contacted Bond Arms about the barrel lock-up, they said that they occasionally run into this problem. All that's needed to resolve the lock-up is a simple fix to the offending barrel. If you find one of your barrels causes the release to lock, just send it to Bond Arms and they will fix it for you at no charge.

The second non-ejection event was caused by an imported brand of .410 shotshell. Bond uses high tolerances to insure the best ammunition performance possible. In the case of their .410/ 45 Colt barrels, they use Winchester ammunition as their test standard. Some imported shells can have variations in their design specs that cause them, when fired, to stick tightly to the barrels. Bear that in mind when shopping for ammunition.



The new Jumbo grip (left) has a unique curved design. The rounded shape, along with increased panel thickness and an extended finger rest, acts to reduce felt recoil.

### AMMUNITION RESULTS

It's rare for a gun review to include the testing of multiple calibers of ammunition. In most cases, a test involves one gun, one caliber, and a handful of different brands of ammunition with different bullet types and weights. For all intents and purposes, this was a test of eleven guns, each with a varied set of ammunition to test. The table to the right captures what I call the 'Best of the Test'. To qualify, these loads demonstrated the best balance of accuracy, manageable recoil, and reasonable muzzle flash for their respective calibers.

Since there isn't room in a single article to comment on all of the positive shooting experiences I had, here are my favorites:

#### FEDERAL'S .327 MAGNUM

.327 Federal is a relatively new round with grand potential. Though other gun manufacturers are still catching up, Bond has their .327 barrel ready to go. This round promises recoil similar to .38 Special while delivering performance similar to a .357 Magnum. In the Bond Arms pistol, the 85 grain Hydro Shock lived up to that promise, proving to be both accurate and comfortable to shoot. If you want to bring the recoil of



A whole different ball game with the turn of just two screws.

the .327 barrel down to a 'powder puff' level, then .32 H&R ammunition will do the trick.

While conducting this test, Federal did me the favor of providing two new .327 loads that will be available in their American Eagle brand. The 85 grain JSP handled much like its hollow-pointed compatriot, but will do so at a lower cost. If you want to see what the .327 can do with a magnum-level powder charge, then the 100 grain JSP is the way to go. The flash and recoil of the 100 grain cartridges were on par with the 158 grain .357 rounds I tested. It literally blew my hair back. It was exciting to find out that Federal's .327, and just one of Bond's barrels, can provide such a diverse and enjoyable range of shooting experiences.

#### THE PSYCHIC 9

It's not unusual during a long session at the range to tap out a few wandering shots. I had placed the 9mm barrel towards the end of the row of barrels to test in hopes that it would, with lower recoil, be kind to my fatiguing wrists. Not only was it comfortable to shoot, but it was exceptionally accurate. Spookily so.

This was especially true when I loaded the barrel with the 'Best of the Test' rounds listed in the table. Even when I used more relaxed defensive point shooting techniques, the bullets went exactly where I wanted them to go. It was as if they were reading my mind. The 9mm barrel proved the old adage that a good gun will often out shoot the shooter. Accurate and the ammunition is less expensive. What more could you ask for?

#### A MANAGEABLE .357

.357 Magnum is rarely thought of as 'subtle' when it comes to recoil. This is especially true when firing bullets over 125 grains in weight. Even in full sized revolvers, .357 can give you a run for your money. I hate to admit it, but I

hesitated a little the first time I fired a full-power magnum round in the Defender pistol. Yeah, I even squinted a little too.

The first shot I fired was not the near-death experience I was expecting. In fact, the recoil was similar to the .44 Special and .45 Colt Only barrels: stout, but not painfully so. I thought the best balanced loads would all be light weights, but I was in for a pleasant surprise. Hornady's 140 grain FTX produced a low muzzle flash, moderate recoil, and the accuracy I was looking for. I ended up shooting almost double the ammunition needed to for the test because I enjoyed shooting this round so much.

### THE BEST OF THE TEST

Caliber	Brand
.22 lr	CCI Stinger 32 gr GLHP
	CCI Mini Mag 36 gr GLHP
.327 Fed	Federal Premium 85 gr Hydra Shok JHP
	9mm
.38 Special	Hornady Critical Defense 115 gr FTX
	.38 Special
.357 Mag	Black Hills Ammunition 125 gr JHP +P
	.357 Mag
.40 S&W	Winchester USA 110 gr JHP
	.40 S&W
.44 Special	Hornady Critical Defense 165 gr FTX
	.44 Special
.45 acp	Winchester Super X 185 gr STHP
	.45 Colt
.410	Winchester Super X 225 gr STHP
	.410
	Federal .410 Handgun 4 Pellet - 000 Buck

The listed rounds demonstrated the best balance of accuracy, manageable recoil, and low muzzle flash.

### BEYOND THE BARRELS

For those who have large hands, or who just want more to hang on to, Bond has added the Jumbo Grip to their already extensive line of grip panels. The grip is unique in both its feel and styling. Taking advantage of pistol's birdshead design, the longer, thicker Jumbo offers a curved back strap that acts to reduce felt recoil. It doesn't hurt that the grip looks really cool, too. Even though I have smaller hands, I enjoyed using the Jumbo Grip.



Bond rounds out their defensive options with this handsome Vantage folder by Buck Knives.

It was especially nice to have on hand for the longer test sessions.

To round out their defensive options, Bond has added a line of knives with grip panels made of the same signature woods they use in their pistol grips. Under the monogrammed hardwood is a Buck Knives' Vantage folder. The blade is quick and easy to open, with the handle offering just the right balance of width and thickness for easy carry and comfortable handling. I especially appreciate Buck placing the pocket clip at the butt end of the handle to allow for a more natural draw from the pocket.

Bond's holsters are the answer to many a concealed-carry prayer. Crafted of quality leather, all of the holsters I tested did exactly what they were supposed to do: they held onto the gun, allowed for easy drawing and



Gather up all your favorite Bond Arms options for a fun shooting session at the range.

re-holstering of the pistol, and, best of all, they stayed where I put them. Aren't all holsters supposed to do that? They are, but many fail in one or more of these responsibilities. Bond has done us the favor of providing holsters in just about every carry category there is. At least one of these quality holsters should fit your needs.

### CONCLUSION

The Bond Arm's double-barrel pistol proved it's not just another derringer. All of the components I put to the test exceeded my expectations for quality and performance. All of the barrels, even though most of them are only 3" long, showed much better accuracy than I would have expected. Even the mystery frame, that neither Bond or I could vouch for, proved to be strong and reliable.

You're not going to find many other handguns with this many options, let alone at such a reasonable price. This pistol, with its roots in Old School design and craftsmanship, certainly meets the requirements of the New Rule of modular design. And it does so with aplomb. Now, the only thing missing is an accessory rail ...

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